

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 3672

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CE
SUBJECT: POWER PLAYS WITHIN THE UNP

1. ALTHOUGH LITTLE HAPPENS IN SRI LANKA'S INTERNAL PARTY POLITICS THAT HAS AN IMMEDIATE DIRECT BEARING ON U.S. INTERESTS AND OBJECTIVES, OCCASIONALLY WE LEARN OF INNER PARTY TENSIONS AND RIVALRIES THAT GIVES TANTALIZING CLUES TO THE FUTURE. THE FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS WERE MADE BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE BAR ASSOCIATION, ERDLEY PERERA, WHO BELONGS TO THE UNTITLED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP) AND HAS ACCESS TO THE PRESIDENT.

2. CIVIC DISABILITIES BILL. PERERA SAID THE BAR ASSOCIATION IS OPPOSED TO THE BILL AND THAT MANY MEMBERS WANTED THE ASSOCIATION MEETING HELD AUGUST 5 TO ISSUE A RESOLUTION CONDEMNING IT. HOWEVER, AT A BAR ASSOCIATION MEETING HELD AUGUST 5, AGREEMENT WAS REACHED THAT SUCH A RESOLUTION SHOULD NOT BE ISSUED BECAUSE THE BILL IS BEING CONSIDERED BY THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT. A PUBLIC DECLARATION ON THE BILL COULD BE READ AS AN ATTEMPT TO INFLUENCE THE COURT'S DECISION
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AND WOULD MAKE THE PRESIDENT OF THE BAR ASSOCIATION
LIABLE FOR CONTEMPT OF COURT PROCEEDINGS.

3. PERERA EXPECTS THE COURT TO RULE AGAINST AT LEAST PART OF THE BILL, BUT EVEN IF IT DOES, THE BILL WILL BE PASSED BY THE NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY (NSA). THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT RULINGS ARE ONLY ADVISORY OPINIONS

AND ARE NOT BINDING ON THE NSA.

4. PRESIDENT'S ROLE. AS TEMPORIZING MEASURE, PERERA MET WITH THE PRESIDENT FOR 40 MINUTES, CONVEYED THE BAR ASSOCIATION'S REACTION TO THE BILL, AND SOUGHT TO HAVE THE PRESIDENT WITHDRAW IT. INITIALLY, PERERA THOUGHT THE PRESIDENT MIGHT BE LETTING THE BILL GO FORWARD ONLY TO WITHDRAW IT AT THE LAST MINUTE AS MEANS OF PUTTING THE PRIME MINISTER IN HIS PLACE. PREMADASA, THE PM, IS THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE BILL.

5. TO PERERA'S SURPRISE, THE PRESIDENT WAS ADAMANT IN HIS DEFENSE OF THE BILL AND ITS NECESSITY. THE PRESIDENT BELIEVES IT IS THE ONLY WAY TO CONVINCE THE PUBLIC THAT MALFEASANCE AND MISUSE OF POWER BY POLITICIANS WILL BE PUNISHED. HE INTENDS TO SUBJECT HIS OWN ADMINISTRATION TO THE SAME SCRUTINY AFTER FIVE YEARS IN OFFICE.

6. CONCERNING THE PRESENT BILL, HOWEVER, THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT HE WOULD PERSONALLY REVIEW EACH CASE AND WOULD STRIKE THE NAMES OF THOSE PERSONS AGAINST WHOM THE EVIDENCE IS INSUFFICIENT OR THOSE WHO DID NOT HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO PRESENT A DEFENSE TO THE COMMISSION.

7. PERERA SUGGESTED TO THE PRESIDENT THAT IN ORDER TO GIVE THE APPEARANCE OF IMPARTIAL JUSTICE, THAT ALL CASES
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BE REVIEWED BY THE NSA STANDING COMMITTEE COMPOSES OF UNP, SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY AND TAMIL UNITED LIBERATION FRONT MP'S. PRESIDENT THOUGHT THE IDEA A GOOD ONE AND AGREED TO IT.

8. POWER BLOCS WITHIN THE UNP. ACCORDING TO PERERA, WHEN THE PROPOSAL FOR STANDING COMMITTEE REVIEW WAS CONSIDERED BY THE CABINET ON AUGUST 9, PREMADASA WAS AGAINST IT AND PREVAILED AGAINST THE PRESIDENT'S AGREEMENT AND HEATED ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT BY GAMINI DISSANAYAKE, MINISTER OF IRRIGATION, POWER AND HIGHWAYS LALIGH ATHULATHUMDALI, MINISTER OF TRADE, AND (.W. DEVANAYSGAM, MINISTER OF JUSTICE.

9. PERERA BELIEVES THAT PREMADASA WAS DETERMINED TO DISPLAY HIS POWER. HE SEES THREE POWER GROUPS WITHIN THE UNP COMPETING FOR THE PRESIDENCY IN 1983, PREMADASA, DISSANYAKE AND ATHULATHMUDALI. BECAUSE OF HIS EARLIER EXPERIENCE IN PARLIAMENT, DISSANAYAKE IS NOW THE STRONGER CHALLENGE TO PREMADASA, BUT HE IS NOT AS BRIGHT OR AS STEADY AS ATHULATHMUDALI. ATHULATHMUDALI DOES NOT HAVE AS STRONG A FOLLOWING AS DISSANAYAKE BUT MAY BE ABLE TO COME THROUGH AS A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE IF PREMADASA AND DISSANAYAKE

SPLIT THE PARTY.

10. BOTH ATHULATMUDALI AND DISSANAYAKE HAVE CASTE (GOYIGAMA) AND YOUTH GOING FOR THEM. PERERA BELIEVES THAT CASTE WILL BE AN EXTREMELY INFLUENTIAL FACTOR IN DETERMINING WHO WILL BE THE UNP'S NEXT PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. IT IS NOT THAT PREMADASA IS BARRED BECAUSE OF HIS LOW CASTE, BUT WHEN THE RECKONING IS MADE, BEING OF THE GOYIGAMA CASTE WILL WEIGH HEAVILY IN THE CONSIDERATIONS. DISSANAYAKE HAS AN ADDITIONAL ADVANTAGE OF BEING AN UP-COUNTRY KANDYIAN.

11. E.L. SENANAYAKA, MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE HAD BEEN MENTIONED AS LEADING A POWER BLOC WITHIN THE UNP, BUT CONFIDENTIAL

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PERERA DISCOUNTS HIM. SENANAYAKE HAS STRONG LOCAL SUPPORT IN THE KANDY AREA, BUT DOES NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT FOLLOWING ELSEWHERE IN THE PARTY. HIS ANTICS ARE TOLERATED BECAUSE HE HAS SACRIFICED MUCH FOR THE PARTY, PHYSICALLY AND FINANCIALLY.

12. COMMENT: PERERA IS OUTSPOKEN AND PRESENTS HIS VIEWS FORCEFULLY. HE OBVIOUSLY NEITHER EXPECTS J.R. JAYEWARDENE TO RUN IN 1983 NOR PLACES MUCH STOCK IN PREMADASA'S CHANCES. WRIGGINS

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